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EXCISE E

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ACTION EA 19

INFO SAL 01, SAH 03, GPM 03, SC 01, RSC 01, USIA 12, H 02, NSC 10, NSAE 00, L 03, INR 07, P 04, CIA 04, DOD 01, SP 02, SS 35, AID 30, IO 2, RSR 01, /160 W

R 291105Z AUG 67
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5597
INFO AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE 2321
CINCPAC
AMCONSUL DANANG 828
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 3984

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY Joan Ignelzi DATE 12/23/81
PORTIONS DENIED AS INDICATED

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 4353

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

SUBJECT: PRE-ELECTION PICTURE IN NINH THUAN PROVINCE

1. MOST IMPORTANT EVENT OF ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN NINH THUAN OCCURRED AUGUST 17 WITH APPEARA E OF GENERAL THIEU. NINH THUAN IS THIEU'S BIRTHPLACE AND HE DEVOTED A FULL 24-HOUR TO VISITING AHHALF-DOZEN HAMLETS, DISTRIBUTING LAND TITLES TO PEASANTS, AND SPEAKING TO A CROWD OF SEVERAL THOUSAND PEOPLE INCLUDING ALL THE NEWLY-ELECTED VILLAGE AND HAMLET OFFICIALS. THIEU EMPHASIZED THEMES OF PEACE, PROSPERITY, DEMOCRACY AND THE NEED FOR FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS. "DON'T LET ANYBODY FORCE

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YOU TO VOTE FOR ME JUST BECAUSE I AM FROM NINH THUAN", HE SAID. THIS PITCH FOR FAIR ELECTIONS WAS REPORTEDLY REPEATED

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TO THE PROVINCE CHIEF IN A SUBSEQUENT PRIVATE CONVERSATION, AND OBSERVERS INTERPRET IT AS ENTIRELY SINCERE.

2. THIEU DOES NOT HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT CARRYING NINH THUAN, HOWEVER, AS A FAVORITE SON HE SHOULD POLL WELL OVER FIFTY PERCENT OF THE 67,409 REGISTERED VOTERS IN THE PROVINCE. THERE ARE 14,000 LARGELY RURAL CATHOLICS IN THE PROVINCE, AND THIEU WILL GET MOST OF THOSE VOTES. NINH THUAN ALSO HAS ABOUT 15,000 CHAMS WHO, ALONG WITH THE APPROXIMATELY 10,000 MONTAGNARDS, WILL LARGELY VOTE THE GVN SLATE. THE CATHOLICS AND MINORITY GROUPS WILL BE JOINED IN SUPPORT FOR THIEU BY MANY VILLAGERS TO WHOM GENERAL THIEU'S FAMILIAR FACE AND LOCAL ORIGIN WILL BE PERSUASIVE. DESPITE THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DISLOCATIONS CAUSED BY THE LARGE AMERICAN AIR BASE AT PHAN RANG, THE CITY IS PROSPEROUS AND CITY DWELLERS HAVE LITTLE REASON TO SEEK A CHANGE. FURTHERMORE, NINH THUAN ENJOYS PERHAPS THE BEST SECURITY OF ANY COASTAL II CORPS PROVINCE, AND THE GVN GETS THE CREDIT FOR THAT.

3. THE MOST SIGNIFINRNT OPPOSITION TO THE GVN SLATE COMES FROM THE PROVINCIAL UNITED BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION WHICH IS

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HEADED BY A PRO-THICH TRI QUANG BONZE FROM HUE, THICH THIEN PHUOC. [redacted] HE SUPPORTS TRAN VAN HUONG WHOM HE SEES AS ONLY CIVILIAN CANDIDATE WITH A CHANCE TO DEFEAT THE GVN SLATE. HOWEVER, IT APPEARS THAT UBA INFLUENCE DOES NOT EXTEND FAR BEYOND THE CITY OF PHAN RANG AND THE TOWN OF THAP CHAM; THUS IT IS DOUBTFUL IF MANY VOTES FOR HUONG CAN BE EXPECTED FROM THE LARGE BUT INERT RURAL BUDDHIST POPULATION.

4. THE REVOLUTIONARY DAI VIET PARTY IS SMALL; HOWEVER, SEVERAL PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS ARE REPORTEDLY RDV MEMBERS. ALTHOUGH WELL REPRESENTED BY ENERGETIC AND ARTICULATE REPRESENTAT VE LI DINH CAI, THE RDV WILL NOT BE ABLE TO DELIVER MORE THAN A FEW THOUSAND VOTES TO HA THUC KY.

5. ALL PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES ARE REPRESENTED IN NINH THUAN BUT ONLY FOUR, THOSE OF THIEU, HUONG, SUU, AND HA THUC KY,

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ARE VERY ACTIVE. THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL JOINT PUBLIC APPEARANCES BY THESE FOUR. OTHER REPRESENTATIVES APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN CHOSEN ALMOST AT RANDOM. FOR EXAMPLE, A BICYCLE SHOP OWNER IN PHAN RANG FOUND HIMSELF THE DESIGNATED REPRESENTATIVE OF SOUTHERN VNQDD CANDIDATE NGUYEN HOA HIEP. THE BEWILDERED MAN CONFESSED

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TO AN EMBOFF THAT HE HAS BARELY HEARD OF HIEP, KNOWS NOTHING OF HIEP'S CAMPAIGN PLATFORM, AND THUS DOES NOT DARE CAMPAIGN EETIVELY FOR HIM. ELECTION PUBLICITY MATERIAL, BOTH PARTISAN AND OF THE GET-OUT-THE VOTE VARIETY, ARE MUCH IN EVIDENCE, AND ARE EVEN TO BE SEEN IN RELATIVELY REMOTE VILLAGE.

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